



Green Infrastructure Options for  
Improved Waterways and Catchment  
Management in Cape Town, South Africa

# Restoring Cape Town's waterways through green infrastructure



Bundesministerium für  
wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit  
und Entwicklung



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für Internationale  
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## **Why this matters**

This case matters because climate resilience cannot be delivered through hard infrastructure alone. It shows how cities can use green infrastructure to protect people, restore ecosystems and create more dignified public environments in under-resourced neighbourhoods.

## **The urban pressure**

Cape Town's waterways and catchments were under pressure from increasing flood risk, poor water quality and ecological degradation. Underserved communities were most exposed to these hazards and often had limited access to safe, dignified recreational spaces. Without intervention, climate change would intensify flood risks, worsen water quality and further damage biodiversity sites and receiving coastal lakes, known locally as vleis.

## **The partnership response**

The project formed part of Cape Town's strategic Liveable Urban Waterways Programme. Cities Finance Facility (CFF) worked closely with the city to strengthen coordination between water, sanitation and environmental teams, while embedding expertise to support day-to-day project preparation. The programme was delivered through collaboration between the City of Cape Town, C40 Cities Finance Facility (CFF) and delivery partners supporting climate resilience, project preparation and finance mobilisation. The partnership also engaged community forums and local partners to support ownership and social value.

## **What the project did**

The project developed two masterplans for 14 potential green infrastructure and waterway rehabilitation projects in two catchments. These projects are intended to rehabilitate rivers, wetlands and floodplains, reduce flood risk, improve biodiversity and water quality, and activate local engagement with riverine environments. The work also produced a financing strategy for a EUR15.02 million investment package, including climate grants, private investment through a water fund, public funding, NGOs and City Improvement District partnerships.

## **Interventions and outcomes**

- Prepared two catchment masterplans for 14 green infrastructure and waterway rehabilitation projects.
- Developed a financing strategy combining climate grants, private investment routes, public funding and local partnerships.
- Created guidance for 10 active Catchment Management Forums and strengthened community engagement around riverine environments.

## **What made it work**

The programmatic approach and cost-benefit analysis were decisive. The analysis showed that benefits exceeded costs, helping restore political support when capital budgets were under threat. The masterplans also translated an ambitious city strategy into a practical portfolio of projects.

## **Challenges and lessons**

Initial capital budgets were deferred because of city funding constraints. The team had to pivot toward advocacy, technical evidence and expert committee support to restore momentum. The lesson is that resilient urban infrastructure needs strong evidence and flexible financing routes, not only technical design.

## **Relevance to other cities**

Relevant to cities facing flood risk, degraded waterways, biodiversity loss and unequal access to green public space.

## **Follow-up opportunity**

This case could support further exchange on catchment governance, green infrastructure finance, urban water resilience, biodiversity restoration and community-led stewardship.

For more information visit: [www.c40.org](http://www.c40.org)



## **Partnerships to deliver prosperous urban futures**

Part of the UK's contribution to the thirteenth session of the World Urban Forum, this case study highlights how cities are responding to challenges through practical, place-based collaboration. It reflects a shared commitment to learning, collaboration and building partnerships for the future of cities.